

Linguistic transformation and preservation of the mother tongue of Saudi Postgraduate scholarship students and their children

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Abstract— Experiences of linguistic shift (LS) and language maintenance (LM) among Saudi postgraduates who had returned home from studying internationally were investigated. Assessment of perspectives of their first language (L1) among the learners and their children was undertaken, in addition to efforts at advocating language maintenance adopted by educational facilities, cultural and religious associations, as well as the learners themselves. Furthermore, the strengthening of language maintenance in particular fields was examined. Semi-structured interviews were carried out to discuss with and observe Saudi postgraduate students, who possessed over five years of study experience in nations where the first language is English. Evidently, no robust ties to their L1 are felt by young learners, even though their language is appreciated by postgraduate learners and they exert themselves to maintain it. Thus, a decline in L1 writing capabilities occurs, while code reversals pervade their L1. The lack of impact on L1 from language shift has been established in recent studies, while the limited duration of the issue was identified in the existing literature. Maintaining one's L1 is affected by numerous variables, challenging common perceptions. With postgraduate learners studying and working internationally, their instruction in Arabic and English has led to a multilingual society emerging when they return home. However, isolation from and eradication of cultural norms is just one of the various detrimental outcomes of linguicide which stems from language shifts. Accordingly, this study aimed to establish the extent to which a marked change in language ability occurs among Saudi postgraduate learners when they come home.

Keywords— Sociolinguistics, multiculturalism, multilingualism, local language, language shift, language maintenance, Saudi postgraduate student returning to Saudi Arabia.

I. INTRODUCTION

Either for spiritual or practical purposes, human beings have constantly pursued alternative experiences, never considering a single location to be their home. Moreover, the traditional caution against leaving one's homeland has often been ignored by individuals from an array of socio-political circumstances, whether escaping hunger or war, as refugees, migrants, or drifters. Meanwhile, history is rife with examples of those exiled from civilisation, or taken as slaves to lands abroad.

Consequently, global transformation in languages, economics and society has been broad as new territories saw migrants come and settle. There can be a rather

burdensome weight of language and customs that accompanies individuals as they move; purposefully or not, these can change as engagement with the new region's established languages and cultures occurs. Both the recipient country and the arrivals will see changes as subconscious adoption of their respective dominant cultural characteristics occurs. On this basis, global citizens may be formed among students, whose entrenched local attitudes are transcended.

International population changes significantly affect individuals' adopted communication methods and languages. When a society's daily political and economic processes are participated in by individuals from broadly different linguistic and cultural heritage in a specific

locality, this leads to the development of robust multilingual and bilingual societies. A diglossic situation is one where two discrete variants of one language are adopted for divergent purposes. The appearance of low and high varieties of a language occurs in a diglossic context.

Language maintenance (LM), language shift (LS), creoles, pidgins, diglossia, code mixing and code switching, as well as multilingualism and bilingualism, are examples of the varied sociolinguistic dynamics that emerge during the interaction of languages. Graddol (2020) posited that languages are affected by two distinct aspects, namely the speech community of their birth, as well as the languages acquired during their lives that affect linguistic behaviour. A particular language—not necessarily one's L1—may be adopted more often, while the linguistic capabilities of an individual can be affected by any feature of life, including social mobility, migration, career and education. However, it is a progressive generational timeframe over which significant shifts in an L1 occur. Once an additional language has completely transplanted an individual's L1, this is referred to as LS. If a person or collective continue to speak their L1 despite compulsion to change, this is deemed LM.

Linguistic changes and potential have been consistently present; linguistic rises and falls have been linked to political and natural phenomena, while linguistic has occurred at times. When there is a power divide exists in a society, an obligation to adopt the most powerful group's language may occur for a particular speech community, regardless of their minority or majority status. Furthermore, if an individual shifts between languages, this is a linguistic phenomenon referred to as code-switching. Through this phenomenon, the international growth in English has occurred.

The first language of Saudi Arabia is Arabic, although the nation is multilingual. Recently, there has been an unprecedented adoption of English in the country. Due to the King Abdullah Scholarship Programme (KASP), it has been possible for Saudi learners to become international students. Indeed, the expansion of international students from Saudi Arabia has been one of the swiftest at present, due to the ambition and breadth of the KASP.

During the 2018/19 academic year, the US saw the enrolment of just below 60,000 Saudi students. In 2019, Canada received over 14,000 Saudi students, based on Canadian International Education Agency information. Also, during 2018/19 in the UK, the sixth-largest non-EU sending market for students was Saudi Arabia.

The implementation of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Programme (KASP) will occur over the coming five years. Since 2007, the project has been extended a

number of times; by King Abdullah for a three-year period in 2009, then again in 2012 to take it to 2025.

Accordingly, this research is concerned with the phenomena of LS and LM, which Saudi postgraduate learners and family members with a minimum of five years abroad in countries where English is the first language are typically characterised by. Determining whether language loss has occurred among them is one aspect of this research. Moreover, whether living abroad has facilitated the preservation of traditional dialects among individuals will be significant to establish in relation to LM. If this was not possible, why did LS occur?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

How contact between languages in various cultures globally leads to LM or LS has been investigated in various research. Among an immigrant community, or multilingual or bilingual society, the degree to which an L1 continues to be used by a person or collective is defined as LM (Longman, 2013). Furthermore, the procedure through which a new language is acquired by a collective, typically at a loss to the L1, may characterise LM, without reversing the definition just provided. In a location, there will be additional dominant languages, contact with which will shape LS and LM. Habtoor (2012) suggested that due to language interaction, pressure from the foremost linguistic group may not lead to loss of L1 among a marginalised ethnolinguistic collective or linguistic minority. Trudgill (2020) defined LS as the process of an L1 being dropped for an alternative language by a linguistic group. Given that Saudi Arabia's present linguistic environment has not been investigated before this research, it is not possible to verify the findings of previous investigations in relation to the specific Saudi situation. However, to more effectively comprehend LS and LM's modes and causes, research external to the Saudi Arabia context has been assessed here.

Notably, a report titled *Euromosaic* was published in early 2022, a product of significant investigation into the minority language groups present and reproducing in the European Union (EU). The title of the report reflects its aim, which was to investigate language production and reproduction, alongside associated obstacles of those processes, characterising minority language groups. Minority languages' adoption in linguistic communities, educational facilities and the domestic sphere was one of the focuses of the survey, among numerous other subjects. Both LM and LS are markedly affected by the significance of language to cultural reproduction and social mobility, in addition to language prestige, according to the study. Furthermore, language preservation was found to be

crucially affected by linguistic tradition. Ultimately, if intergenerational instruction in the norms and skills of a language does not happen, erosion of the language will arise.

An individual's preservation of their L1 was stressed as crucial by Wolck (2017), entailing a sense of obligation and an affirmative attitude to it, as well as being well informed about the language. LS and LM are affected by nine general principles, as Wolck posited. The foremost dynamic is postgraduate learners transferring the L1 to their offspring, as a form of generational continuity. If postgraduate students do not use their L1 with their children, yet speak to their peers or their grandparents in their L1, the prospect of language erosion due to intergenerational dislocation arises. However, a language may be retained if children and their postgraduate parents communicate using it.

Furthermore, linguistic standardisation and unification can promote language survival. For example, Bolivian Quechua endured as a consequence of this process (Wolck, 2017). Improved prospects of language survival are linked to the unity of a minority language, whereas linguistic and dialectical disintegration exacerbate language change.

Maintaining a language can also be facilitated if a more dominant language has similar usage fields. A given language's perceived narrow relevance to particular fields can lead to negative viewpoints of it as a minority language. Contrastingly, the power of a minority language may increase if it is used alongside a majority language in a specific environment. As Wolck clarified, rather than practical complementation and segregation, minority languages are better protected through coexistence bilingualism.

Variables Impacting Language Transition and Maintenance

The domestic setting is the foremost location where an individual can strike to ensure L1 LM. Pauwels (2008) emphasised the fundamental contribution of cross-generational transmission in relation to a language's endurance. Indeed, endangered languages' continuation rests vitally on graduate learners' activities. If the domestic setting sees a decline in L1, then further areas of usage will be detrimentally impacted. Thus, LM is crucially contributed to by the family (Clyne & Kipp, 2020). The death of a language will follow in its absence from the original environment. Given that postgraduate students returning from abroad will reside in Saudi Arabia with their relatives, the chances for L1 LM will be numerous. Studies have shown that robust language proficiency has a greater prospect of enduring if the number of relatives is large. Accordingly, as Pauwels (2020) related, children in

nuclear families or with single parents have less likelihood of LM compared with those in bigger families. Ultimately, sufficient L1 speakers within the domestic setting are necessary to counter LS.

Edwards (2018) explained that LM is assisted by the significant demographic variables of the size of population speaking the language and the proximity of those individuals to each other. Communal living—particularly in places in proximity to international schools or language facilities—is favoured by Saudi postgraduate learners once they move back to the country. If a residential community is founded, LM can be crucially affected by the establishment of a linguistic enclave.

Additionally, relatives' perspectives and those of the dominant collective regarding the family language of children can significantly affect LM or LS being advocated or disincentivised. Notably, attempts at LS reversal or hindering of it are fervently challenged by graduate learners and their relatives.

The language development of a child is significantly affected by the amount of time they are learning overseas, as well as their age. Waas (referenced in Guardado, 2012) identified that the first language dialect of German children had been almost forgotten by them after 20 years of residing in Australia, based on a limited sample. An L1 may be challenging for migrant children to preserve if they have spent an extended period in an overseas country. Merion (2003) and Kouritzin (2020) noted that progressive as opposed to swift alterations in language will emerge, based on scientific findings. Indeed, linguistic alterations may require a minimum of three generations, according to Gardner, McEntee-Atalianis & Finnis (2020). The bilingual first generation will start the change procedure, with the second generation continuing it; the L1 might be eliminated from the third generation if migrants effectively integrate with the dominant culture. Moreover, L2 LM and acculturation have been identified as negatively correlated (Mills, 2018, referenced in Garcia, 2019). Swifter acculturation may occur the longer the period of time spent overseas in a country.

Stoessel (2019a) stressed that LS and LM are significantly affected by social networks; individuals from the same linguistic background are able to connect with new arrivals through social media, thereby markedly affecting L1 LM. As time progresses, a progressive decline in L1 use will stem from these social networks' usage. Furthermore, the occurrence of LS or LM is impacted by the perception of the language by the user. Integrative viewpoints are associated with instrumental and egoistic positions, rather than social and interpersonal positions. Numerous professionals have suggested that L1 LM can be facilitated

through an integrative strategy. For example, greater identification and bonds with the language community and associated specific culture can be nurtured through an integrated perspective of language (Baker, 2020).

III. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research approach was adopted to assess LS and LM. Information was collected via participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Postgraduate students from Saudi Arabia who had spent over five years studying abroad alongside their relatives, in countries where the L1 is English, who were going back to their home country, were the study population, with 15 participants in total. They had different academic backgrounds and were of differing age. Furthermore, the results were supported through analysing their children's statements relating to cultural and social events.

Study Questions

The following study questions were developed to direct this research:

1. Upon going back to Saudi Arabia, what are the perceptions of heritage culture and language among Saudi postgraduate students?
2. Upon going back to Saudi Arabia, is it apparent that Saudi postgraduate students and their relatives undergo a language shift?
3. If this is the case, what are the reasons for the language shift? If this is not the case, what variables affect their language preservation?
4. Is L1 maintenance at serious risk from code shifting or code mixing?

IV. ANALYSIS OF DATA AND DISCUSSION

Contact with different languages, the variables affecting LS and LM, areas where the L1 is adopted, perspectives regarding their L1, the form of education they accessed, among other significant aspects pertaining to Saudi Arabian postgraduate students going back home, were illuminated in this study. The majority of results accorded with the extant literature on LM and LS. An intriguing result was the increasing bilingualism among children of postgraduate learners. Arabic and English are usually spoken by Saudi pupils studying at international schools.

An individual's L1 LM rests crucially on the domestic sphere according to linguists, as this research supports. Intergenerational transfer of a language is usually considered appropriate if relatives engage in strong communication. The linguistic activities of relatives,

postgraduate students and their children are essential to the endurance of a minority language (Pauwels, 2008). Typically, there is a high density of individuals who attended the same linguistic community schools in the locations where most postgraduate students go back to with their relatives after studying abroad, as a new study has found. Accordingly, in the domestic setting and among fellow pupils, children will have ample prospects for L1 practice. Consistent meetings with one's relatives have a greater likelihood of occurring if you reside close to others with the same L1. Indeed, L1 LM is fundamentally shaped by such relationships being maintained. The L1 is pervasively adopted due to international schools being preferred by a substantial number of postgraduate students for their children.

Upon going back to Saudi Arabia, the degree to which code matching and mixing occurs among postgraduate students has been established in this research. Following every journey away from Saudi Arabia, the English communication skills of children will increase. Notably, the prospect of written or verbal LS occurring as a result of such code mixing is small. A direct desire to present their appreciation of the local culture and language explains children's code mixing, as opposed to being an inevitable consequence of diminished L1 alternatives among the children.

Code mixing and code swapping are not just phenomenon associated with the Arabic language. Regular combination of Arabic and English—as well as different languages—indeed switching between them, occurs among Saudi Arabian postgraduate students. Linguistic transformation is linked to such code switching, according to Holmes (2018). All efforts at code shifting and mixing are usually challenged by most postgraduate students after going home to Saudi Arabia, as they dedicatedly protect their L1. Furthermore, the young generation's regular combination of English and Arabic is opposed by most postgraduate students due to such linguistic trends being attacked by the government. Consciousness of this issue is strong among the majority of overseas postgraduate students, as other languages' dominance of their L1 is something they want to avoid.

Despite having acquired an L2 by studying abroad, a profound appreciation of their native culture and language typically characterises Saudi postgraduate students after going home. Norton (2020) noted that distinguishing identity, culture and language is unfeasible. In this study, bilingualism was reported by over 99% of respondents, apart from the female homemaker. Arabic and English fluency was possessed by the majority. Certain respondents acknowledged that due to declining usage of

their L1, their writing proficiency had diminished, even though the majority considered themselves to be exemplary in L1 LM while studying overseas.

Moreover, LM was found to be markedly affected by the media, based on this research's results. Most of the study respondents posited that a significant component of LM is the role of traditional media. Having gone back to Saudi Arabia having studied overseas, numerous postgraduate students are captivated by Saudi Arabia's cultural, social, economic and political promotion. Reading physical or web-based copies of Saudi newspapers, as well as watching the country's television channels, were ways that the postgraduates stayed abreast of Saudi news while abroad. Additionally, given that literature and politics are subjects that appealed to the men, they engaged with native language communities' social media sites and entered into debates and deliberations. Of further note is that Arabic television channels were the sole ones watched by most housewives, meaning that the pervasive perception of the authentic guardians of cultural heritage as being women was corroborated in this study.

The foremost results from this research relate to the fact that postgraduate students going home to Saudi Arabia are multilingual and engage in code mixing. Maintenance of the traditional Arabic language is not threatened by multilingualism, which is globalisation's positive outcome, although traditionalists are concerned by code switching, including the mainstream media. LM has been upheld by the existence of language communities, family and community events, embassy-affiliated social groups, as well as Arabic TV stations and media abroad. Furthermore, LS has been mitigated among children due to English and Arabic being the languages of school teaching.

V. CONCLUSION

As the data analysis demonstrates, all Saudi postgraduate students returning to Saudi Arabia and living with their families prefer to communicate in Arabic in the home domain. With time, the majority of Saudi postgraduate students who return to Saudi Arabia develop fluency in English and Arabic. What is most encouraging is that they also develop into a multilingual, multiethnic, and multicultural society while retaining the legacy language and essence of their own culture, which may be defined as the transformation of a local Arabic into a global one.

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